

312 strings of beads, rags or bits of clothing in the holy tree which
 788 often overhangs the well, so that it may bear their ailments.
 755 I happened to come across a well near Cork just after mid-
 778 summer this year. Alongside were the smouldering remains
 of a great bonfire which had been lit on St. John's Eve.
 The visitors to the well, having drunk the water, walked three
 times sunwise around the corbelled stone well-cover, and
 taking up pebbles kept ready to hand in crevices, they made
 the sign of the cross on certain stones which were marked with
 deep grooves which generations of patrons had cut by the
 same process. Some wells have old "cup-marks" instead
 of crosses, and it seems probable that these pagan symbols
 were made long ago in the same way as the crosses which
 have replaced them. Their round completed, the visitors
 looked into the well, for if they were to recover from their
 ailments they would see the trout which is reputed to live
 there and to show itself only to the cured.

● [825]

The virtues of these wells are many: they are believed to
 be efficacious in such varied complaints as eye-disease,
 lameness, toothache and in some cases barrenness. The first
 Sunday of each quarter of the Celtic year is generally the
 visiting time, but perhaps on account of the weather the
 summer festivals, and especially midsummer, are most
 popular. Pins and other bits of metal are sometimes deposited
 in wells. Offerings are also made to certain trees in the form
 of pins stuck in the bark, each pin representing a wish.
 Special gatherings known as patterns or pardons were held at
 such sites on the anniversary of the patron saint of the district.
 Devotions were followed by dancing and games which often
 degenerated into fights. It is possible to see relics of paganism
 in the sanctity of such sites, and it is worth recalling that
 some of the more celebrated centres of pilgrimage in western
 Europe, like Santiago da Compostella, seem to have mega-
 lithic connexions.

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The mention of cup-marks brings us to the superstitions
 concerning the great stone monuments with which they are
 often associated. A recent article in the *Ulster Journal of*

777 bless it," and any evil or illness happens afterwards, the chances are
that the blame will be put on the "bad eye." The evil-eye may be
[788] rendered harmless by making the sign of the cross in the name of the
Trinity.

754 There is an old woman in Bofin who is considered to be a witch,
and is said to be in the habit of putting the "bad eye" on people and
on domestic animals.

825 There are several beliefs about beasts and birds, such as that the
821 barnacles on the logs of drift wood, which often come ashore, develop
into geese, and that a gale of wind may be brought on by the simple
expedient of putting a black cat under a pot. Seals are thought to be
enchanted men, and will dive if they see a priest or a man in a black
coat; their appearance is said to portend bad weather. Who these
825 enchanted men were, and by whom they were placed under the en-
chantment, I could not ascertain, but the following mention of this
belief is made in a footnote by the late Mr. Hardiman, in his edition
of O'Flaherty's "H'Iar Connaught" (p. 27):—

"Many traditions, connecting these harmless animals with the
marvellous, are related along our western shores. Among these there
is one of a curious nature, viz. that at some distant period of time
several of the Clan Coneelys (Mac Congaile), an old family of Iar
Connaught, were by "Art magick," metamorphosed into seals! In
some places the story has its believers, who would no more kill a seal
or eat of a slaughtered one than they would of a human Coneely. It
[551] is related as a fact that this ridiculous story has caused several of the
clan to change their name to Conolly."

776 Fairies are firmly believed in by many, and one man who is sub-
ject to epileptic fits relates long stories of his dealings with them.

Many tales are told about them and their doings, but few of them
can be collected by a stranger, as the people are very reticent on the
subject. They are supposed to exercise a malign influence on infants,
especially before baptism, stealing them if good-looking, and supplying
their places with puny, wizened changelings. These are got rid of,
and the true child recovered by very simple means; it is only neces-
sary to light a large fire and put on the pot to boil, and then to
threaten the changeling that he will be boiled, when he will vanish,
and the lost child be found in his place.

[775] Woman who die in childbirth or from puerperal fever are believed
to be carried away by the fairies to act as wet-nurses.

776 Mrs. Allies informed me that her baby is regularly spat upon by
854 the people when its nurse takes it out, in order to keep off the fairies

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895

ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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BROWNE—*Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea, & Portacloy*. 631

The effect of the evil eye is much dreaded, and illness and misfortune are ascribed to it; for this reason, a child or an animal should not be praised without saying "God bless it," to avert misfortune. To counteract this influence, human beings may be spit upon, or the sign of the cross made on them in the name of the Trinity. Cattle sometimes have knot-charms tied to their tails. 777 789

Many animals have beliefs or customs connected with them. A fox should not be interfered with by the people in his neighbourhood, or he will revenge himself by raids on their fowls; if well treated he will do no damage. A 825

Seals are thought by some to be enchanted men or transmigrated souls, and for this reason are not molested. A man at Portacloy asserted that it was unlucky to kill seals, and added, as a warning, that he knew a man, a relative of his own, who went into a cave to slay a seal, and on raising his club to strike it, saw the animal change into a large frog. He did not, however, seem to have any very great faith in his own story, as a few minutes afterwards he offered to sell a sealskin.

It is believed also that on some nights seals assume human shape, and that a number of them gather together on the rocks and wail aloud.

C. O. states that the people of Tip were reputed by their neighbours to be "peculiar" because they ate seals' flesh. [262]

The soil of Inishglora is thought to be so fatal to rats that if one of these animals be brought to the island it will die as soon as it touches the soil, and a handful of sand from the island will perfectly protect a house against this kind of vermin. A black hen used, on some occasions (and may perhaps be still) to be buried alive with its wings spread out to bring about a fair wind or some desired good fortune. [823] [821]

Ghosts and apparitions are fully believed in. Two instances of the spirits of drowned persons being seen walking about are reported to have occurred within the past year; one of these was said to have occurred near Blacksod, where the ghost of a sailor was seen on the sea-shore. An apparition in the form of a black dog is sometimes seen by belated travellers not far from Portacloy. About half-a-mile outside Belmullet and within the peninsula of the Mullet, there is a mound in a field by the roadside; this is raised over the bodies of some of the peasantry who were slain in a combat with the yeomanry (known as the battle of Meenane Creve), in the year 1793. At this spot the ghost of a young man without a head is seen sitting upon the 775

LAZY-BEDS

an English introduction since 'sowing baskets' are listed in the 241
medieval pipe-rolls of the Pale. In parts of the west, for example
Mayo, a skin tray was used for sowing. But the usual Irish
method is to sow from a linen sheet, kept specially for the pur-
pose, which is tied round the sower. The seed is thrown with a
one-handed cast, and it is not everyone's privilege to be allowed
to undertake this important task. It calls for skill and concen-
trated care, for 'a missed bit' is a bad omen, foretelling death [187]
The seed should all be safely 'buried' by the beginning of May,
and in Co. Armagh the first cuckoo's call was taken as a sign. [825]
To be found sowing corn after this was a mark of deep disgrace:
the laggard was labelled 'a cuckoo farmer'.

With modern ploughs and improved drainage it is not often,
save in the tiny fields of the west, that one comes across cereal
crops sown in ridges, but the lazy-bed method is very generally
employed for potatoes and other crops where the spade is used,
though the great bulk of the potato crop is sown in drills. The
potato ridge presumably derives its name, lazy-bed, from the
fact that the sod under the ridge is not dug: the bed is built up
on top of the grass with sods and soil dug from the trenches
between the ridges. Not only does this method make full use
of the humus and decaying grass but it prevents the sets from
becoming waterlogged and rotting, for the whole bed is raised
above the water-table. And the unbroken sod checks the down-
wash of plant nutrients. The trenches or furrows between the
ridges provide open drains, and the lazy-beds are always care-
fully aligned with the slope of the land. Moreover, when the
trenches are dug a second time for earthing the potatoes,
they often go deep enough to penetrate the hard layer of iron
pan which tends to form under heavily leached soils by the
washing down of iron salts. This the old-fashioned plough could
not do. Breaking the impermeable pan not only improves the
drainage but provides minerals which are returned to the topsoil
when the potatoes are earthed. The ridges in which potatoes
are grown in their Andean homeland appear to be similar to the
Irish lazy-beds, and tuber crops throughout the tropics are
planted in ridges or mounds, but the ridge-technique is cer-
tainly older than the potato in Ireland. Clearly an efficient 241
shovel is a requirement in the construction of ridges of any 412

HARVEST

243 heads of corn at the wrong end, or they would be missed in thrashing with the flail, and for the same reason the ears of the straw band-knot should lie towards the top of the sheaf. The sheaves should be laid with their butts to the wind, for these need most drying. The bands should be tied with nice judgement, tight but not over-tight: one should not be able to put the toe of one's boot under the band when one stands on the butt of the sheaf.

[461] As in all farming operations conducted in traditional ways, music and magic to ease the labour were part of the scene.

• [825] There were shearing songs to match the rhythm of the sickle, and its efficiency was improved by keeping a fly or other insect imprisoned in the handle; perhaps its incessant activity was meant to speed up the work. Another strange belief was that

[777] luck followed the reaper who carried a child on his back. The world of magic and fairy was close by at harvest time: it was believed that the top grain (pickle) of every stalk of corn was empty because it had been taken by the fairies and was their due. The sheaf had its share of lore, too, related possibly to its

[754] semblance of human shape. A curse could be worked by sticking pins into the joints of the straw, and the sheaf might be properly waked and buried so that as it withered the object of the curse would decline. Stooks with their 'hudders' (Fig. 51) (hooding sheaves) also take on human forms, and I have known various terms for these large stooks applied as nicknames to broad-based country women. 'The last sheaf' also is known as the cailleach or hag.

Beliefs and customs connected with the last sheaf are legion and find their counterparts in many parts of the world. 'Winning the churn' was an incentive to the reaper, for good luck attended those who had their rigs sheared quickly if only because they avoided the ill-luck of being last. Stories are told of rigs being left unclaimed and uncut because their owners feared to incur 'the famine of the farm', of having the hag to feed until next harvest. The basis of this belief was that the last sheaf was sometimes hidden overnight in the corn of lazy farmers, who would watch at nights and reap by moonlight to avoid what was an omen of misfortune or death.

[787] The last handful of standing corn, selected for the purpose,

HOME-MADE THINGS

463 survivors of these wandering folk are the tinkers, sworn enemies
326 of the farmers but useful in many ways to the farmers' wives.
Though miscalled gypsies they are of native Irish stock and
have little, if any, Romany blood. Numbering between 5,000 and
6,000 but declining, they now find little scope for their tradi-
tional skill as white smiths but subsist mainly on collecting
scrap metal and dealing in horses. Down to recent times their
[273] services were in demand for making and repairing the stills
in which home-made whiskey (poteen) was manufactured.
[554] Weavers and tailors as well as tinkers were despised by farming
folk as 'travellers', whereas the smith was held in high esteem.

Most of the home industries depended on wood and other
463 plant products, natural or cultivated, and on the skin and hair of
178 animals. Nearly all these crafts are now dead or dying and their
products, perishable by nature, are either gone or fast disap-
pearing. A few skills live on, others survive in children's pas-
s-times or in the memories of old people. The unwritten lore of

[824] the countryside included a vast store of information on all the
[825] varied trees, plants and animals, birds and fishes which in times
past played their part in the lives of the people. Nearly every

[861] species had its practical, medicinal or magical uses, and through
careful observation, empirical knowledge and a wealth of
poetic fancy, a vivid interest in the world of nature was main-
tained and passed on from one generation to another. Much
of this lore has been lost with the decline of the Gaelic tongue
and the spread of formal education and book-learning. The

[871] country school must conform to a clerk-breeding curriculum
designed to meet urban demands. The destruction of woodland
and the debasement of standards of living which followed the
adoption of the alien potato and the consequent famines had
serious consequences on home crafts. Then mass-produced
goods came to drive out many products which depended on a
discriminating knowledge of local materials. Thus barbed wire
has taken the place of its rustic prototype—a hay-rope strung
with thorns—and binder-twine has killed a dozen varieties of
home-made ropes and thongs. The economist might think of
them as bonds tethering rural communities to the soil, but to
the sociologist they imply spiritual as well as physical links
with mother earth.

HOME-MADE THINGS

Pyrenees and in Africa, but the flail, apparently spreading through western Europe in post-Roman times, in time replaced it almost everywhere, to be in turn displaced by the mechanical thrasher. Thus the sound of the flail has almost gone from the countryside. The best thrashing place is the floor of the barn above the byre, with its opposite doors to draw the wind and advertise the flailer's industry. Such barns, however, were not built outside the planted districts before agrarian changes and improvements spread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ireland knows nothing of the carefully built thrashing floors of England and Scandinavia. At best on the farms lacking a barn a thrashing board was sometimes kept, a square wooden platform raised a few inches off the ground. A good thrashing floor should bend to meet the flail, and in Scandinavia, for instance, great pains were taken in the old days to construct floors which would make the flails sing. They were occasionally strung with wires, and to magnify the echo of clay floors a horse's skull was buried under each corner.¹ It has been thought that this purpose was secondary to the luck it was hoped would follow from what was originally a foundation sacrifice. In Ireland traditions of the burying of horses' skulls under the floors of dwelling houses are both widespread and well authenticated. The usual explanation again is that this gives the house an echo, but it is also said to be lucky, and Sean O'Sullivan concludes that the custom of burying skulls began as a substitute for foundation sacrifices.² In Armagh 'the frontal bones of a horse's head are regarded as being peculiarly sonnie; they were often buried in barn floors and under the thresholds of dwelling houses for that reason.'³

In time, the expressed object came to be to magnify the music of the singing flails as well as that of the ballad-singing and dancing before the fire. The space between the doors of the old style kitchen-byre, it will be recalled, was a favourite thrashing place in times past. The Briget's Crosses above the door would have blessed the thrashing as well as the cattle. It

¹Albert Sandhelf, *Singing Flails* (Folklore Fellows Communications, Helsinki, No. 136), (1949).

²Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 75 (1945), 45-52.

³J. Donaldson, *Upper Fens in 1838*, 77.

FAIRS AND GATHERINGS

'the order of the fair' was prescribed and the business lasted several days. On the evening of Gathering Day a procession assembles at the bridge and makes its way to the central square carrying (nowadays in a large cage mounted on a lorry) a billy-goat bedecked with ribbons. He is chained by the horns on a high platform erected for the purpose and, supplied with a liberal stock of cabbages, he presides over the fair. Tradition says that the goat used to stand, 'garlanded by greenery' on the old castle which was erected here by the Geraldines in the thirteenth century. The business of the fair is the sale of live-stock, and as with many another large fair it is a traditional gathering place for the tinkers who in Ireland take the place of the gypsies. On the evening of Scattering Day the Puck is borne triumphantly back to the bridge. The popular explanation of the custom is that it commemorates an occasion when the noise of goats warned the Irish of advancing English forces, but it is more reasonable to see Puck as a symbol of fertility and good luck. 12th August is Old Lammas, and Lammas Day, the 1st August, was known to the Irish as 'Lewy's Fair', in memory of a pre-Christian deity. This season of high summer has many associations with the pastoral freedom of the hills, with young people and with dancing and courting. There are traditions of other Puck Fairs in the south of Ireland, and there were certain fairs at which a white horse was paraded through the assembled crowds and then tied up to preside over the proceedings. [543 527 443 825]

Another celebrated gathering place was the great fair of Ballinasloe, which brought such fame to this Galway town that the *Gazetteer* describes it as 'the cynosure of much the larger part of the western province of Ireland', so prosperous that even its poorer quarters, 'a segregation of lanes, and houses, and cabins, aggregately repulsive', were yet 'greatly less haggard than what constitutes the whole of many a third or second rate town in Ireland'. The fair was held from the 5th to the 9th of October, and during the first half of the nineteenth century the average numbers of sheep and cattle offered for sale were respectively 90,000 and 12,000. Ballinasloe Fair served the west of Ireland in much the same way as the great trysts of Crieff and Falkirk served the Scottish Highlands in the days of

FIXED FESTIVALS

sometimes killed at this time, so that the animal slaughter may be a sacrificial substitute. 527 [782]

Although Christmas is the outstanding Christian festival of the year its traditional 'Twelve Days' of holiday are steeped in pagan lore and in folk practices relating to the winter solstice and the new year. In Co. Cavan I came across a custom known as 'blowing the Christmas horns' by which youths heralded the festival by blowing horns from hilltops. The burning of candles on Christmas Eve is a ceremony which involved divination as well as devotion. 'Each district seems to have its taste in colour. For example, in Limerick and Clare white candles are mainly used, while red and green are popular everywhere. In the Midland areas pink candles are sought, and in some parts of Dublin only blue candles will be taken. In Killarney nothing less than a 6-lb. candle will suffice for the occasion'.¹ On Christmas Day traditional ball-games were played, often between parishes, and near the coasts these meetings took place on the strands. 526

St. Stephen's Day is in many parts of the country associated with the hunting of the wren, and the sport is not entirely extinct. It seems that some details of the ceremony, such as the rhymes which are sung, are of English origin, but the wrenboys often wore straw masks in the native tradition, and occasionally animal skins or horns. The wrens were killed beforehand by noisy and excited bands of youths, and carried on a holly bush or a decorated wooden tray on St. Stephen's Day (Fig. 87). The procession, shouting and singing the prescribed songs to the accompaniment of home-made skin tambourines, made its way from house to house demanding money or drinks. The wrenboy processions, despite their English rhymes, appear to be a degeneration of more elaborate performances of native origin which had affinities with the mummers' plays and which like them may have been attracted by the powerful prestige of the Christmas festival from their proper season of spring. At one time the wrenboy ceremonies involved much fertility symbolism and were attended by men disguised as women.² The robin, linked with the wren in superstition, was also the object of persecution in south-western Ireland, but in this case the tail 527 825

¹Ireland (Bulletin of the Department of External Affairs) No. 303 (1955), 10.

²E. R. R. Green, *U.J.A.*, 9 (1946), 3-21.

FIXED FESTIVALS

- 527 was pulled out and the bird's life spared: 'In severe winters a
825 robin with a tail was rarely seen.'¹ Another popular Boxing-Day
pastime was bull-baiting, though in Kilkenny, where it was
officially supported by the town officials and was presumably an
English introduction, it was held on the following day, St.
John's. In several parts of the country bull-baiting continued
well into last century, in Kilkenny down to 1837.²

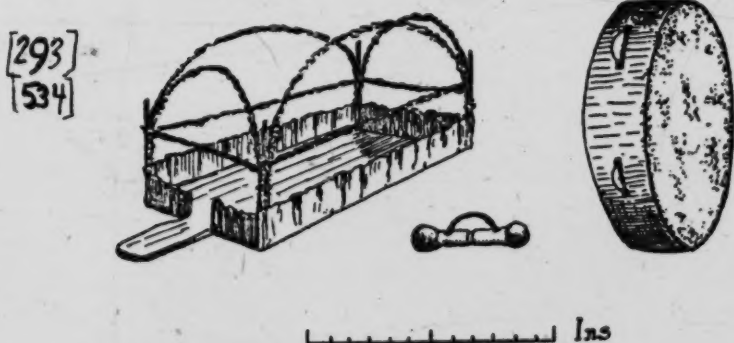


FIG. 87. Hunting the wren. Wren Box for carrying dead wren, and wrenboys' tambourine and stick, Co. Clare. (National Museum, Dublin.)

- 527 New Year's Day similarly has attracted to itself some of the
portents proper to the older year's beginning on 1st November.
The prosperity of the individual and the household is felt to
depend on the events of New Year's Day. The fairies are active
on New Year's Eve and it is well for people to stay indoors
that night. First-footing ceremonies appear to be confined to
families of recent Scots origin, but the idea behind them is
widespread. In parts of Co. Down it is customary for youths to
prepare little 'wisps' of straw or dry grass and go from house to
house distributing them together with New Year's greetings in
the expectation of a gift. In the west on the last night of the
year (or alternatively on the eve of Twelfth Night) a large
'Christmas Loaf' specially prepared for the occasion was taken

¹W. R. Le Fanu, *Seventy Years of Irish Life*, 41.

²J. G. R. Prim, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1853), 326.

OLD PISHROGUES

Old customs die hard in isolated islands and in the loneliness of ships at sea. Fishermen in the north to this day avoid direct mention of many words such as pig, priest and rat, and similar tabus are found among fishing communities as far away as Malaya, 'Formerly when starting on fishing expeditions the crews of Irish boats were very careful that their craft should leave the shore in a direction sunways, and even yet this superstition directs the course of many a fishing boat',¹ and, we may add, controls the casting of a net. A boat should always be entered on the right-hand side. In the kingdom of Mourne [192] 'it was unlucky to be the third boat out on leaving harbour, and men would go to any lengths to avoid it, even tying two boats together so that there should be no third boat. On a Monday morning a fisherman will laughingly refuse to give you a light for your pipe, for he would be giving away his luck for the week. There were lucky and unlucky people to whom to sell fish, and it was the custom not to sell all the catch but to leave some fish in the boat. When a present of fish was made they were lifted backwards high over the head from the boat [431] and not given straightforwardly. Nor would the old fishermen clean their boats until the end of the season, or even wipe the fish-scales from their boots. An unlucky boat would try to steal the luck of another boat by rubbing alongside it.'² The long-line fishermen of Carrickfergus would always spit on the first and last hook they baited, and in the mouth of the first fresh fish taken off the hook.³ Superstitions attach also to fresh-water fish, especially to the sacred trout which, for the most part invisible, bring luck to pilgrims who catch a glimpse of them in certain holy wells. 825 ● 312

Innumerable pishrogues concern the domesticated animals, and in particular cows and their milk and butter, which are peculiarly liable to supernatural influences. In the face of these unseen forces it is important that a new season or a new venture, or any operation carried out for the first time, should be begun with care and due ceremony, for special danger is attached to these occasions. Thus the first rich milk given by a 234 825

¹Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 52.

²E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 196.

³S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 260.

OLD PISHROGUES

234 newly-calved cow should be milked on to a piece of metal
●525 placed in the pail. Offerings of the 'beastlings' were poured in
the raths and at the roots of fairy thorns, to appease the fairies.
When taking a drink out of doors, the old countryman will
casually spill a portion of the draught on the earth as a compli-
mentary libation to the good people. 'When a cow fell sick
through fairy malice, it was formerly by no means an uncommon
practice, in the west of Ireland, to devote the ailing animal to
St. Martin. The ceremony was performed by letting a few
drops of blood from the cow in honour of the saint.'¹ Cows
which, for no apparent reason, are not thriving are said to be
elf-shot. The elf-stones or fairy-darts which are supposed to
[172] have caused the mischief are prehistoric flint arrowheads such
as can be picked up in the fields. One of the tricks of the cow-
doctor who is called in, and who keeps a few arrowheads handy,
is to produce one by sleight of hand from the flank of the ailing
beast. Or counter-magic can be worked by means of a flint
arrowhead which must not be allowed to touch the ground after
it has been found. The cow-doctor uses sympathetic magic in
curing calves believed to be suffering from intestinal knots by
drawing apart over the animal's back the loose ends of a string
tied in a complicated witch-knot or 'bat', of the type which comes
undone when pulled. But as always he must work the magic
correctly, for if the knot is not resolved another one is tied
inside the calf.

789
234 Hanging in the byre one sometimes sees a flint pebble sus-
[823] pended on a string through a natural hole. It is a witch-stone,
protecting the cows from milk-stealers, and it may owe its
virtue to the flint or to its symbolic ever-watching eye. In the
[171] Ardenne a holed flint hung in the stable is believed to preserve
the horses from nightmares,² and nearer home in the York-
shire dales holed stones known as ring-stones protected the
cows from the evil eye. 'Blessings on all that I can see' is the
traditional formula to use when one enters a byre. An ill-
disposed person could, merely by looking at it, 'blink' a cow
so that its milk would yield no butter. The cow could be cured
by burning under its nose a portion of the blinker's clothes

¹Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 6.

²H. H. Turney-High, *Ch'leau-Gérard* 53 (19), 232.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date) 1910-12
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County Clare

Collectanea.

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I was present at its first telling, before they heard from our old servant, Mrs. Julia MacHugh, of the local belief. The tale, I have heard, was fully confirmed by their driver and a guide, a workman of the D'Esterres, who piloted them along a flooded and unfenced reach of the road a little to the east of Bunratty. A large, dark, shadowy dog seemed to run upon the moonlit water, first to one side and then to the other of the carriage, and was more than once lashed at by the driver. It disappeared near where the road ascends from the low marshy "corcasses" along the foot of the Cratloe hills. Julia MacHugh, a woman of wide local knowledge, at once "explained" the apparition and said that the omen was good if the dog ran alongside, but bad if he leaped at the carriage or horses. On one occasion he leaped at the mail car, and soon afterwards its driver was thrown off and killed on the spot. I recently learnt that a ghostly black dog haunts by night the lonely road above the old ruined house of Glenomera.

Seals.—The belief that seals are disguised human beings prevailed, I am told, in Clare forty years ago, at least along the Kilkee coast.²⁰ I never heard it myself from fisherfolk. A little further north, from Connemara up to Mayo, the Kinealys are reputed to be descended from a beautiful seal-woman. The belief is nearly universal, and is attached even to a few of the family in Clare.

Rabbits.—Early this year a clever intelligent man, near Ennis, went with a boy and a ferret to shoot rabbits from a fort. Three ran out and were shot at and missed. The man then called the boy to come at once, and ran off in great excitement and fear, saying that the rabbits were fairies. Some such belief must be widely spread, as Mrs. MacDonnell of Newhall told me that, when a girl, she took up a small and very tame white rabbit in the glen at Edenvale and immediately afterwards found that she had lost a ring. The people who helped in the search, and her father's gamekeeper, were convinced that the rabbit was a fairy and had taken the ring with it.

Birds.—I have read of an enchanted bird which was caught in the cave of Kilcorney and spoke with a human voice.²¹ The

²⁰ So the late Hugh Massy Westropp.

²¹ *Ordnance Survey Letters*, (Co. Clare), vol. I, p. 236.

COLLECTANEA.

A FOLKLORE SURVEY OF COUNTY CLARE (*continued from p. 60*).

XII. *Lucky and Unlucky Deeds.*

It is unlucky to see the new moon through glass; to throw 777
dust or slops out of a house on New Year's Day, as you throw
away with them all the good luck of the year; to throw dust or
slops towards a neighbouring "fort";¹ to see one magpie, or a [825]●
a "weazel" (stoat), without saluting it by bowing or taking off
your hat; to go out of a house where they are churning without
"putting your hand to the churn," *i.e.* giving a few strokes with
the churn "dash," so that you will not "take" the butter; and
to take fire out of a house,—so that, if you light a pipe indoors,
it should be smoked out before leaving. Iron and pins,—except
crooked pins with the points towards you,—should be picked
up, and the first thrown over the left shoulder. Rub your hand
on wood if it itches or after a boastful speech or speaking too
confidently of the future; in east Clare you touch wood twice,
with the phrase, "Good word (*or* time) be it spoken," after an
imprudent expression.² You should bow to the new moon.
Turn your money for luck after seeing the new moon. On visit- [574]
ing a friend in a new house, you should give some present,
however small. In east Clare some persons are careful to throw
a hen or other fowl that has died of disease over the fence on
to their neighbour's land, to remove the ill-luck from their own
poultry.³ Others will not wash eggs offered for sale, as it stops

¹ So Dr. Macnamara and others.

² "Scratch it in wood, and it will come good," says a rhyme.

³ Practised near Tuila, and resulting in some cases in great ill-will. [578]

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XIV. *Calendar Customs.*

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Most of these customs are so widely spread as to require only brief notice, and were noted, before 1816, by the Rev. James Grahame, the curate of Kilrush. They comprise the eating of pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and of eggs at Easter; playing tricks and "fooling" on April 1st; setting May bushes before houses on Old May Day; lighting bonfires on Midsummer Eve, dancing round them, and driving cattle through them; beginning hunting on Michaelmas Day; Hallowe'en practices on October 31st; midnight processions, with music, on certain nights in the week before Christmas, (which had just been discontinued in 1816); and mummers, wren boys, and bull-baiting on St. Stephen's Day.⁵ The May bush died out, I believe, during the dark years of the Great Famine; I never heard of any limit, other than the clearance of the crops, for beginning hunting; but, except the bull-baiting and the waits, all the rest still exist.

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It is well to have to record the dying out of the custom of killing the wren on St. Stephen's Day, even if it springs from laziness rather than from humanity. "Who cares for the birds but God!" was once retorted when I "put in a word for" the wren. There is probably a very old prejudice against it, for the "droleen" stood confessed as a "little druid" among birds, and the "druid" of Irish tradition was not the majestic white-robed priest of the oak grove, but a sorcerer who injured meanly by spells, a foe of God and of His servants, but a contemptible and impotent one. This feeling was expressed in the contemptuous term *shandruce* ("old druid") for a worthless old man, in use in my boyhood. How far the wren rites have orthodox ritual or etiquette is doubtful. Formerly the youth of a whole district combined as wren boys, but now they go in bands of from two to six,⁶ and the wren bush is often a mere branch with a few rags and no wren. A structure of evergreens, in general design like a *cruz ansata*, covered with streamers and with the dead bird hung

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⁵ Mason's *Parochial Survey* (1816), vol. ii.

⁶ See Plate IX., from a photograph taken on December 26th, 1910, by Mrs. O'Callaghan Westropp of Coolreagh.

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XVIII. *Animal and Plant Superstitions.*

773 I have had occasion to search, in Irish works of pre-Tudor date,
825 for sidelights on the early fauna of Ireland, and the results, so far,
are meagre. There is constant reference to dogs, cattle, horses, deer, and wolves, but rarely do any but the hound put on any definite shape. Even the bull plays little more part in the *Tain bo Cualgne* than Briseis does in the *Iliad*, and generally the animal is a mere appendage to an incident.

[103] *Cattle.*—Place-names give us little information save as to the custom of driving the animals up to the hills in the summer time, Mount Callan being girt by a series of "Boolies" (*i.e.* milking places),²⁰ usually qualified by some phrase such as "of the sun" or "of the sea-gulls." The cow was the practical unit of value in olden times, three cows being worth a woman-slave, and a single one the "ounce," which seems to have been an imaginary standard. Legendary cows, such as the Glasgeivnagh and Glas gamhnach, play a large part in the traditions, the hoofmarks of the latter pitting all the rocks of eastern Burren and its borders. Another supernatural cow predominates in the extreme west of the barony, near Crumlin. The Seven Streams of Teeskagh were said to originate from the exuberant milk of a "Glas." Supernatural bulls and water cattle have already been dealt with.²¹

778 The most remarkable customs relating to cattle centre round
825 Lough Fergus. Along its north shore stand twelve cairns in an
233 irregular line. On the eighth from the east end are two natural
823 stones resembling a small chair and a cross, named after St.
[776] Forgas, (who appears in none of the calendars and is perhaps a river-spirit). Along with these are put a china image, bits of iron,

²⁰ Boulavaun (white milking ground), Boulinredda (red place), Boolinduff (black), Boolynamiscan (of the dish), and Boolynagreana (sunny) at Callan; Booltiagh, Boolybrien, Boolynagleeragh (of the clergy), Boolyknockaun, Boolyneaska (of the eels), and Cloonbooley in Kilmaley; Booltiaghbine in Kilnaboy, (but the inhabitants say that Booltiagh means "mired by cattle" not "milking place"); Boolynamwella (of sea-gulls) in Kilmihil; Booltydoolan in Killadyerst; and Boolervin (pleasant) in Kilkeedy. In east Clare the name is rare, Boolynacnask (of the Easter sports), in Slieve Bernagh, being the only one known to me.

²¹ Vol. xxi., pp. 480-1.

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buttons, and broken crockery. Patients sit in the "chair" to cure lumbago. It is believed that the water of this lake cannot be boiled and that no one can be drowned by it, and sixty or seventy years ago cattle were cured by it. The beasts were brought in herds to the lake to drink, and were driven into it. If they turned to the right hand they would recover, but not if they swam to the left. It is said that on one occasion a cow sank, but was found next day grazing in a field beside the lake, completely cured. In consequence of drainage works, the water level has fallen, and the mud round the shore is too deep to allow the cattle to be driven through it, so on May Day every year, before sunrise, a little crowd gathers, of perhaps over 100 persons, to fill bottles with the water for curing cattle, especially of "the worm." The water keeps good till the next anniversary, and is also used to give a "good churning" and to clear a "garden" of caterpillars.²¹

In 1839 Lough Iona (now Ecnagh) was reputed to cure sick cattle on Mondays and Thursdays.²² In 1808 the smiths were in some districts employed to kill the cattle,—or rather to fell them for slaying,—and their perquisites were the animals' heads.²³

Persons over sixty years of age are often firm believers in the charming away, or "taking," of milk and butter. The younger folk usually deny that they hold this belief, and, where they take part in quarrels caused by it, avowedly only do so to support their elders. Two families living in the south-east corner of the county had about 1890 a quarrel resulting in a serious feud, hardly as yet appeased. It seems that for about three years the cows of the first household gave but little milk, and that little so bad and unwholesome for pigs and calves that several died. Ordinary veterinary practitioners, and even the local "knowing men," did no good, so the farmer sought a "wise man" of renown in another parish. This sage directed his client to watch the local well all May Eve, and to let no one come near it till after midnight. The farmer and his sons hid near it, saw a man and a woman of the

²¹ *The Journal of the Limerick Field Club*, vol. ii.

²² *Ordnance Survey Letters*, (Co. Clare), vol. i, p. 161.

²³ Hely Dutton, *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*, p. 359. The smith was a magician amongst the Irish, and the ancient *St. Patrick's Lorica* prays against the spells of "smiths, women, and druids."

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A FOLKLORE SURVEY OF COUNTY CLARE (*continued*).

XVIII. *Animal and Plant Superstitions (continued)*.

Horse.—I have found no folklore relating to horses except that already given regarding supernatural animals.¹ I have since recalled a legend of a dangerous spectral horse, probably a *púca*, haunting the bridge over the Blackwater, between Limerick and Clonlara, and the tree-darkened road towards the latter place,—a terror by night to passengers till about twenty years ago. There was also the bodiless head of a spectral horse which used to float beside cars on a road near Clooney, of which I heard about 1876, but now forget the details. The riding of horses by fairies was not unknown.

Dog, Fox, and Hare.—Besides the supernatural dogs already noted,² and the "Red Dog" (or Fox?), near Cragmoher, at Drehidnavaddaroe Bridge, there is little to tell. Finn's famous hound Bran was drowned at Tirmicbrain lake, and a ghastly dog broke the bones in some graveyard, (perhaps Doora or Clooney), before 1876.³ It is unlucky to meet a fox, a red-haired woman, or a hare "first thing" in the morning. The hare is said to eat human flesh,—probably from being often "started" in graveyards. I have been told by several Clare people of witches turning into hares, but the alleged incident was never located in the county.

Seal.—A very vague belief prevails on the coast that seals are

¹ Vol. xxi, pp. 481-2.

² Vol. xxi, pp. 482-3.

³ As in most of my recollections of folk-tales heard before 1876, the details are forgotten.

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776 enchanted human beings.⁴ It gets more definite above Galway Bay, where the Kinealeys are of reputed seal descent. Some such belief may underlie the name Cumarra (or sea-hound) in the MacNamara family. I found more difficulty in getting fisher beliefs in recent years than in getting folklore from the country people. Much of what I heard in 1906 was probably of tourist origin, and, like the *merrow* at Killard,⁵ not to be trusted as genuine belief.

Otter.—Beyond vague belief in an enormous "durracow"⁶ (the king of the otters), which I heard of as a child on the Shannon Bank about some unnamed lake in east Clare, I am not aware of any folklore about this creature in the county. There was said to be a "remarkable" otter at Glenomera.

Cat.—The cat was much regarded by the early Irish, and holds honourable place in their ancient code of laws. It even appears in the illuminations of the *Book of Kells*. Numerous places in Clare bear its name, but local belief tends to consider the "cat" in these names as a weird monster. The "Cata" and "Faracat" of legend⁷ were probably "dragons." The cat has supernatural knowledge. If a cat looks fixedly at a person without apparent reason it forebodes sickness or death, but if it does so to an unmarried person, after making its toilet, it foretells marriage.

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⁴ So in Aed Baclamp from the *Book of Lismore*, (*Silva Gadulica*, vol. ii., p. 72). St. Brendan changes 30 seals into horses, which carry into the sea their riders, who, on reaching it, are, like their steeds, changed into seals.

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⁵ Vol. xxi., p. 342. Mrs. Dorothea Townshend of Oxford calls my attention to the probability that this story was made up by Dr. Keightley (v. App. to his *Fairy Mythology*). In my original Ms. I expressed great doubt as to this story, having found no equivalent to it near Dunbeg or Kilkee, but this was unfortunately omitted in publication. The Miltown mermaid was probably one of the white seals occasionally seen on the coast.

⁶ *i.e.* *Dobharcán*, water-bound. The Irish called the wolf *faol-chú* (wild bound) and *cú allaid*, and the marten *crann chú* (branch bound). The more common name for the wolf in Clare is *braght*, as in Breaghva and Breffy, the name of several townlands. The other wolf name *Mac Tíre* (son of the country), is attached to Knockavictiera hill near Lisdoonvarna (where it refers to the animal), and to Cahermactire, a fort near Inchiquin Hill; at the latter place it may refer to a person, as the name Mac Tíre is found in various annals.

⁷ Vol. xxi., pp. 477-9.

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The wild cat is believed to have a spike or hook at the end of its tail which it can stick into a pursuer, but I found no such fine legend in Clare on this point as I did near Kenry in Limerick, where the cats pursued, and anchored themselves on, a farmer and his dog, after chasing them from Clorane to Old Kildimo!

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Elk.—The Irish elk is known among the turf cutters of Clooney and Tulla as the "Fiaghmore" (so pronounced, but really *fiadh mor*, big deer),—"it might be one of the deer Finn hunted." Its numerous remains have given to one townland the name "Fiaghmore, Fiagh,"⁸ in 1655. The "Agallamh"⁹ has an interesting allusion. Diarmaid kills a huge deer, and its antler, when resting on his foot, reaches above his head, despite his great height. Caoilte produces this horn from a lake to convince St. Patrick of the truth of his stories of the heroes.

Badger, Squirrel, and Marten.—It is asserted that there are two kinds of badgers,—the "dog-badger," which eats carrion and digs into graves, and the "pig-badger," which is a strict vegetarian and is eatable. In the *Boroma* tract from the *Book of Leinster*,¹⁰ and the "Agallamh," badger bacon and squirrels are mentioned as fit to set before a king or hero. It is doubtful whether the *toymal*, (kept as a pet by Queen Maeve and killed on her shoulder by Cuchullin's slingstone), was a squirrel or a bird, but squirrel skins, along with marten skins, formed a considerable export from Ireland at least from 1230 to 1580, and in 1686 Roderic O'Flaherty names the squirrel amongst the animals of Connaught.¹¹ The true marten was until recently common in east Clare, and, like the supposed "marten-cat" (a large red domestic cat that has gone wild), was reputed uncanny in my boyhood. I have seen martens at play in the Clare woods in 1869, and had one stuffed in 1876, but they seem now to be extinct.

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Hybrids.—Besides the "dog-badger," there were said to be uneatable hybrids of the cat and the rabbit, and of the rook and

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⁸ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xxiv., p. 94.

⁹ *Silva Gadetica*, vol. ii., p. 176. Antlers over six feet long have been found in Clare, and there is a fine single antler 6 ft. 3 in. long at Violet Hill, Brondford.

¹⁰ *Revue Celtique*, vol. xiii., p. 47.

¹¹ *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xl., p. 245.

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[262] the domestic hen. The "soft egg laid by the cock" was looked on with suspicion, and so was the egg of the bat, which was even unlucky to find, and could be used for malignant charms.

Stoat.—In Clare the stoat is always called "weazel." A corruption of the strange Irish name *Feasóg* (the little beard) is as often used, even by English speakers, as the *whishshoge* or *whushshoge*. The creature was equally disliked and respected. It is wished "Good morning, ma'am," by some, and generally saluted by raising the hat on meeting; but others spit and cross themselves. It is regarded as peevish and persistent; "as cross as a bag of weazels" is a proverb in east Clare, while Finn is compared to a weazel in the pursuit of Diarmaid and Grainne. I have heard many stories about its revengefulness "when its nest is killed," and of one of its persistent attempts to get at a corpse in a house in south-east Clare, rather, it was thought, for magical purposes than from hunger. Old belief ascribed to the animal the power of poisoning. At Carnelly a labourer told that when cutting a meadow near the "Druids' Altar"¹² he killed a young weazel. Soon afterwards his wife brought him his dinner and a can of sour milk. While they talked, she cried out that a weazel was spitting into the can, but the man laughed and drank the milk. Soon afterwards he got violent gripes, and gave himself up for lost. The doctor had great difficulty in persuading him to try any remedy, and his wife was almost scandalized by his recovery. A similar tale was told at my old home, Attyflin, in which young weazels were not killed but put on a wisp of grass safely in a bush. The parents were seen spitting into the milk, but, on finding the young ones safe, they returned and upset the can.¹³ So "even the weazel has justice." Both stories probably originated in the animal's love for milk.

[775] *Rat.*—A Clare woman told me that a man whose love was rejected by a girl living in Limerick city died, and his soul went into a rat and used to bite her throat until she had to emigrate.¹⁴ The rat tried to follow her and was drowned, and so the persecution ended. A curious "parliament of rats" was held near Durra in

¹² Mrs. O'Callaghan of Maryfort and others.

¹³ Late Hugh Maasy Westropp.

¹⁴ Mrs. M. MacCormick.

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Upper Bunratty, the fields being covered with them, but, when it broke up, the "troops" dispersed, and no bands were seen at any distance from the rendezvous. A rat was "heard talking with the Devil" in the grave of an unpopular person before 1875, but how the holders of this curious conversation were identified was never stated. I have met a belief in speaking rats in eastern Clare and among fishermen at Kilkee.

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Hedgehog.—This animal is reputed to steal apples and suck cows and eggs, so that it is persecuted and called *grainoge* (little ugly thing).

Birds.—A pair of ravens roosted in a top window of the round tower of Iniscatha (Scattery) early in the last century. The birds were said to escort their young, when fully fledged, across the Shannon to Carrigfoile Castle in Kerry, and not to let them return to the island.¹⁵ Scaldcrows (roystons) are considered unlucky, and much feared. The old Irish regarded them as incarnations of the war-goddess Bodbh.¹⁶ Birds as omens have already been noted.¹⁷ The bat is looked on as a sort of bird, and it is ominous of death for it to fly at one's face. The entry of a robin into a house is a death omen near Tulla, but elsewhere a sign of good fortune. Although swans are so plentiful that I have often seen more than forty together in Inchiquin and other lakes, the only folklore associated with them seems to be a tale of swan-maidens at Inchiquin. The hunting of the wren has been described in Section XIV.¹⁸

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Fishes.—It was regarded as a custom among the fishermen of Kilrush and Scattery that no one should go fishing for three days after the arrival of the herring shoals, but, when the first day dawned, a crowd of boats was always discovered, and much quarrelling resulted.¹⁹ As the shoals arrived, a mass used to be celebrated on the shore at Kilmurry, Ibrickan, to secure good

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¹⁵ *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. xviii., p. 546.

¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. x.; *Revue Celtique*, vol. l.; Joyce, *Social History of Ireland*, vol. i., p. 267.

¹⁷ Vol. xxi., p. 190.

¹⁸ *Ants*, pp. 206-7, and Plate IX.

¹⁹ Hely Dutton, *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare* (1808), pp. 228, 259.

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226 fishing and to keep off dogfishes and small sharks.²⁰ The reputed
825 giant lake pikes and eels have already been mentioned.²¹

825 "Worms."—Newts, lizards, and large caterpillars are included by the peasantry under this term. They are supposed to be very dangerous to both men and cattle, and are relentlessly destroyed. Of late years I have even had difficulty in saving the pretty little grey lizards, now much rarer than when, over thirty years ago, they swarmed in Clare Abbey and other sunny and sheltered ruins. A colony of unfortunate little lizards in a hollow tree was reported to me as "a nest of adders." My informant²² about the sacrifice on the dolmen of Maryfort,—the daughter of an old Peninsular veteran, living near Clonlara,—told me a circumstantial tale which was faintly remembered at Clonlara many years later. A "worm with legs" ran down a man's throat as he slept in a field, and he pined away, with an ever-increasing appetite, until he was persuaded to consult a "wise person." He was kept from drinking for two days by the expert, and then fed on bacon and taken to a stream. The patient's mouth was fastened open, and a freshly-toasted piece of bacon put near it. The thirsty "worm" heard the running water, and came out into the man's mouth, where it smelt the meat and sprang on it, fixing its claws in it. The "wise man" then threw the bacon into the water, and the man rapidly recovered. A similar story from near Tulla ended in the "worm" drinking and trying to jump back into the patient's mouth, but being killed by the doctor.²³ Children were told that, if they slept with their mouths open, "worms" (apparently caterpillars of the death's head or the puss moth in Inchiquin and central Clare) or

²⁰ Canon Dwyer, *Diocese of Killaloe*, p. 503, writes unsympathetically about "his touching faith of the poor fishers."

²¹ Vol. xxi., p. 480.

²² Mrs. Eliza Egan; see *ante*, p. 51.

²³ I have heard an almost identical story told among my mother's relatives as happening in Lancashire. [The belief in "animals in people's insides" is almost universal in the British Isles; for examples see *N. & Q.*, 1st S., vol. vi., pp. 221, 338, 466, vol. ix., pp. 29, 84, 276, 523; 6th S., vol. i., pp. 311, 392; 9th S., vol. vii., pp. 222, 332, 390, vol. viii., pp. 89, 346, vol. xi., p. 467, vol. xii., pp. 414, 471; *Folk-Lore*, vol. x., p. 251; *British Medical Journal*, 1906; and many newspaper paragraphs, such as one in *Morning Leader*, June 3, 1908. I have heard the tale told in London with a large community of cockroaches as the tenants.—Ed.]

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frogs (at Newmarket-on-Fergus) would creep down their throats. The finding of flukes and other parasites in sheep and cattle has helped the belief, and a beast's tongue, if swollen, is supposed to have been "stung by a worm." We have already noted a cure for "worm" in cattle,²⁴ and the milk of the "Seven Sisters" plant²⁵ boiled in milk cures similar cases in human beings.²⁶

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Frog.—Besides jumping down children's throats, the frog cures a cough if held by the legs, put for a moment into the sufferer's mouth, and returned to the water.²⁷ In a variant of the Bishop Hatto legend, at Bohatey, near Lough Derg, frogs mob and devour a boy who has tortured one of their number.²⁸ Frogs are said to have been rained on a field in eastern Burren more than once.

Insects etc.—An old woman at Maryfort in 1869 scandalized her neighbours by asserting butterflies to be dwellings of the human soul, and that her own soul would go into a "blessed (tortoise-shell) butterfly." Whence she derived this belief is unknown. I heard about the same time, and, it may be, from the same source, a horrible story of a "spider as big as a *bonnive*" (young pig) sucking the blood of children in the dark, but I forget the details. It is lucky to kill the "daudayle" (*dubh dael*) or "devil's coach-horse," for this hideous but harmless creature has the repute of having guided Judas to Gethsemane.²⁹ When it "cocks up its hind end," you should crush it, preferably with your bare foot, for you are then spared a day, hour, or week in Purgatory. In Clare I have only found this belief near Tulla, but it is common in other counties.

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²⁴ *Ante*, p. 58.

²⁵ *Cf. ante*, p. 57.

²⁶ So the late Michael Hazelton, an astrologer and herb doctor near Limerick.

²⁷ So Mrs. O'Callaghan.

²⁸ So Capt. Hibbert of Woodpark. A similar tale is told about toads by Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerary in Wales*, cap. ii.

²⁹ In Ulster the "connach worm" replaces the beetle. The tale says that men were sowing a corn-field when Our Lord and the faithful disciples passed, and that He told the sowers to inform His pursuers that they had last seen Him when they were sowing. The corn at once sprang into ear, and the pursuers, on getting the answer to their enquiry, were turning back when the worm cried out that the seed had only just been sown. The Ulster tale was collected by Mr. W. F. De Vries Kane, D.L., of Monaghan. In Clare Island (Mayo) Mr. N. Colgan found a similar tale told of St. Patrick and his enemies.

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*Charms.*²⁰—The charming of rats, which was described by Eugene O'Curry to Dr. J. Henthorne Todd, seems to have been forgotten in the Doonaha district, where, at least, I never heard of it during several visits in the neighbourhood from 1896. The performance is ancient, being described after A.D. 600 by the famous bard Seanchan Torpeist, a contemporary of King Guaire Aidhne of Gort, who ruled the district adjoining Clare on the north from about A.D. 610. O'Curry's story is that a certain John O'Mulconry joined the Established Church, and was ordained, being eventually advanced to be curate of Kilrush and Kilferagh in the south-west corner of Clare. Now Kilferagh graveyard was so horribly infested by rats that serious accidents occurred at every burial (I presume from their attacks), and every corpse buried there was entirely devoured by the following morning. The curate, horrified by the scenes he witnessed at a burial, proceeded to charm the rats, as the country folk firmly believed him able to do from his knowledge of old Irish literature. A certain John Foley, of Querin on the Shannon, saw that evening what looked like a bank of low-lying fog crossing a bog between him and Kilferagh. He fancied it was the fairy host, and ran to one side, when he saw it was a compact body of rats. They went through his cornfield, without stopping, to Querin point, then burrowing into the dry sand and disappearing. They soon proved as destructive as ever, gnawing the fishermen's nets and boats (probably leather *currags*). The sufferers gathered a great number of neighbours, amongst whom was Owen Mór O'Curry, the writer's father, and proceeded to dig out and kill the vermin. An incredible number were slain, but the survivors seemed innumerable, and in the end, with the courage of despair, attacked the slayers, trying to run up their clothes and bite them. Wearied and terrified at the swarms, the peasantry at last gave up the fight and fled. Eugene O'Curry never heard what became of the remnant of the rats.

Thomas O'Keane, a land surveyor, told O'Curry in 1820 that he knew and used an ancient satirical poem to expel rats, and that he had successfully driven out all that infested his house and mill at Bealahaglas, near Dunlicka Castle. The charm was in archaic and enigmatical Irish. Fired by emulation, young O'Curry

²⁰ Addenda to Section xi., vol. xxii., pp. 49-60.

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wrote a satire against the rats, and tried it on an infested house at Kilkee, in the same year, but without success. 789
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About the same time certain men in Limerick City were famous for being able to free ships in that port from rats. Their method was to fix a razor, edge upwards, on the ship, and by their charms to force the rats to cut their throats on it.³⁰

Dr. G. U. MacNamara tells me that Denis Curtis near Corofin cures liver complaints, bleeding, and cows that have swallowed raw potatoes. He puts his human patients on their backs on his anvil, and pretends to strike them with a sledge hammer. This is done on three occasions, on two Mondays and a Thursday. The patients then drink forge water. All the family have the gift of healing, but only one exercises it. The family legend says that St. Patrick's horse lost a shoe near Kilnaboy, and their ancestor shod it gratuitously. The saint therefore endowed the family with the power, and people even return from America to be cured by the smith. 757

Marriage tabu.—In eastern Clare, a newly-married woman attended Mass on the Sunday next after her marriage, and was severely criticised for doing so. Local opinion held that she and her husband ought not to attend public worship until the second Sunday after the marriage.³¹ 585
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*Púca.*³²—A recent apparition of the *púca* of Clonlara was described to me in 1911 as a dark, shadowy horse near the bridge over the Blackwater, about two miles to the south-west of the village. My nephew, Dr. Hugh Gerald Westropp, heard of similar appearances about 1888. 776

*Lucky and unlucky deeds.*³³—The *geasa* and *buadha*, or tabus and lucky acts, relating to the present County Clare are described in the *Leabhar nā g Ceart* (Book of Rights),³⁴ in a poem by Cuan na 777

³⁰ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. v., ser. iii., p. 362.

³¹ I learn from a Petty Sessions case, March, 1911, at Derrygonnelly, that this custom prevails also in Fermanagh, and that friends and relatives do not visit the young couple in the interim, but entertain them on the second Sunday. [574]

³² Addendum to vol. xxi., p. 481.

³³ Addendum to section xii., *Lucky and Unlucky Deeds*, vol. xxii., pp. 203-4.

³⁴ Edited by John O'Donovan, 1847, pp. 16-21.

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Collectanea.

777 Leochain, who was slain in 1024. The King of Cashel (over-king, therefore, of North Munster) was forbidden to pass a night at Latteragh in northern Tipperary at the beginning of harvest; to encamp for nine consecutive nights at the river Suir; to hold a border meeting at Gowran; and to listen to the groans of women (in a raid) in southern Tipperary. The King of Connacht was not to go in a speckled cloak,—the prose adds "on a piebald horse,"—to the heath of Luchaid in Clare. On the other hand, the ruler of Cashel brought good luck by plundering cattle in Connacht while the cuckoo sings; burning north Leinster; passing over Sliabh Cua,—“on a Tuesday,” says the prose,—to pacify south Munster; crossing Magh Aibhe with a light grey host; and resting six weeks (of Lent) every year at Cashel. It was most unlucky for him to wait for a feast at Killarney Lake for a full week from a Monday. At the present day some families still have their own tabus, lucky and lucky deeds and days, dreams, and omens, which sometimes even run counter to beliefs generally received,—e.g. that the Friday falling on the thirteenth of any month, or to dream of a wild cat or other wild animal, is lucky.

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825 *Witch hare.*²²—Anthony Bruodin (*Bruodinus* or *Prodinus*), a Franciscan of Quin Abbey, tells in *Corolla Oecodemicæ Minoriticæ* (Prague, 1664, p. 73) how his uncle (*patruus*), Florence of Moynaeo (Moynoe on Lough Derg) went out at the dawn of the first of May with his eldest son Bonaventura, (who died in Spain in 1643), and with their hounds to hunt hares. At last the servants saw one sucking a cow. The hounds chased it, biting it as it escaped, into a cottage, where an old woman was found torn behind.

776 *Glasgeivnagh cow.*²³—Vague legends are told of her living at Treanahow, Shallee, and Ballygannon.

Ghosts or fairy men.—Mary (Mescal) Doyle, of Newmarket-on-Fergus, tells how she saw two ghostly men in black walking on a road near that village.

173 *Stolen bride.*—A legend of a stolen bride at Querin on the Shannon is told in Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends etc. of Ireland* (1887), vol. i., p. 49.

²² Addendum to vol. xxii. p. 449.

²³ Addendum to p. 89 *supra*.

[P.270]

22 • THE ISLAND AND ITS PAST

centuries of careful observations. I collected 250 of these signs and placed them⁸²¹ in the following general categories: density, location, and time of mist; type of^[126] frost and heaviness of dew; size and position of rings around sun and moon; color and conformation of sky and clouds at particular times of the day; density and location of fog banks; position and time of rainbows; clarity, closeness, and color of Inis Thiar and the mainland; changes in the weather in relation to tides; actions of animals; and pains in the human body. Of special interest are the signs associated with animal behavior, such as the height at which swallows fly, the prevalence of fly hordes, the crowing of roosters and braying of asses, the position that cats assume at the hearth, and whether or not spiders weave their webs across trails. The expert forecaster will weigh together as many as ten signs before announcing his prediction, and I once collected 16 from an old man in Low Village assessing conditions 12 hours hence. Some signs are quite obviously undependable, among them the quacking of ducks which some say will "call" rain, and the scratching of floors and furniture by cats which, according to others, will point the direction of the wind following a shift in the near future. The folk believe that the moon and tides exert a profound influence on both weather and human behavior; my wife on one occasion was told that her "snappish" mood (the words of a neighbor, not mine) was caused by the new moon.

The climate, in part, determines the conception of seasons held by the islanders. Four seasons are recognized, but their duration deviates from the norm of Western culture. Winter is conceived as embracing only December and January, while spring is thought to commence in February and end in early April. The other two seasons are not so well defined, but most folk agree that summer takes up the greater part of the year—from April until mid-September—and autumn the remaining three months. December and January are regarded as the coldest months, during which time there is a lull in economic activities, but planting begins early in February. Although the prevailing winds during the year are from the west and southwest, for several weeks between January and mid-March icy winds blow steadily from the southeast quarter and cause much physical discomfort and illness. In late March and early April, temperatures rise rapidly, and some islanders believe that March "steals" three days from April so that summer cannot be expected until after April 3rd. The circumstances of the theft are revealed in a legend.

The reason that summer is thought to extend for so long is a psychological^[154] one: the folk dislike winter with its cold and dampness and attendant sickness and the sense of isolation from the world that it brings. Few outsiders visit Inis Beag during the winter, and often the steamer is unable to leave port or must turn back because of gales or high seas. It is not out of the ordinary for the island to be totally isolated for a week or ten days because of inclement conditions. From late January on, warm weather is anticipated eagerly, and I was told time and again that summer was imminent when spells of cold and rainy weather occurred between March and June of 1960. During a quarrel with her husband over his confident weather forecasting ability, a woman noted for being an outspoken realist declared, "Inis Beag has only one summer month—July."

The island experiences but eight hours of daylight, from nine o'clock in¹³² the morning until five in the afternoon, at the time of the winter solstice, and

40 • THE LAND AND THE SEA

duced trawlers and other types of fishing vessels and financed their purchase by islanders of the region, sent instructors to teach fishermen how to use the new boats and gear, set up curing and storage facilities in the islands, facilitated the shipping of fish to mainland markets, and attempted to regulate these markets so as to ensure maximum profits for the folk. These efforts failed for the most part in Inis Beag, and today the men fish from *curach*, much as did their grandfathers. The continuing effort of the government to improve fishing in the area is reflected in instruction in modern fishing techniques at a school in a nearby island, and the successful operation of a number of government financed trawlers and other fishing boats from there.

The islanders consider fish from the sea, which are netted, more palatable and healthier to eat than those caught with lines and trawls, fresh water fish, and fish which have been cured or frozen. Fish taken on lines, because they bleed, and those enmeshed in trawls, because they suffocate, are thought to suffer in taste and nourishment, as do those which are treated artificially for sale; and fresh water fish are believed to be unhealthy to eat because they feed on refuse thrown into lakes and rivers rather than on natural foods. Some folk exclude even mackerel from their diet, since these fish "swim on the surface and eat everything dirty afloat." We already have noted that Inis Beag elders prefer seaweed to chemical fertilizers; the preference for netted fish which feed on natural foods to fresh water fish and mackerel which are contaminated is another example of a recurrent cultural theme—the positive valuation of natural objects and the negative valuation of artificial ones which come in contact with the human body. Other manifestations of this theme are the emphasis placed on folk medicines and the distrust of medicines prescribed by nurse and doctor, the belief that certain foods will assure health and combat specific illnesses, and the fear of piped water and canned foods. I often was told that I could improve my eyesight by giving up my glasses and rubbing dew on my eyelids, or by walking along the seashore to allow the wind and spray to penetrate my eyeballs.

Over 30 varieties of fish are caught off Inis Beag, some with lines of varying length and number of hooks, others in the four types of nets, and a few with both lines and nets. Most important of the fish are: ling, cod, bream, gurnet, haddock, and autumn mackerel caught with lines; plaice, turbot, rock fish, and pollack both netted and taken on lines; and herring and spring mackerel captured in special nets. Trammel and drag nets are used in addition to herring and mackerel nets, and the most commonly used baits are gurnet, haddock, conger eel, bream, herring, and limpets. Fishing techniques vary considerably, as do the times of the year when particular kinds of fish are available, the localities that they frequent, and the baits which are most effective for each variety. Fishing crews form at different times of the year, often to fish in certain areas for specific fish. They are composed of both kin and close friends, and they tend to alter in membership from year to year as other activities intrude.

Before I leave the subject of fishing, I wish to correct three commonly held misconceptions concerning Inis Beag men: they are all skilled seamen; because they spend much of their time at sea they are of necessity able swimmers; and

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90 • THE SUPERNATURAL AND THE ESTHETIC

and other Christian vices are detested and are likely to become the butt of satirical anecdotes and ballads. 771 828

In many primitive and peasant societies, in which Christianity has dis- 000
possessed polytheistic religions, it has been observed that polytheism has left a
legacy whereby the Virgin Mary and various angels and saints are worshipped as
dispensers of personal power in their own right. This has been extended to the
Trinity among the Anang of Nigeria, who believe that God provided independent
power for his human son, Jesus, with which to convert the world to Christianity,
and for the Holy Spirit (who has joined the indigenous pantheon of spirits) to act
for mankind as healer, prognosticator, forgiver of sins, and protector against
ghosts, witches, and sorcerers (Messenger 1959:291). Most Inis Beag folk regard 771
God and the Devil, among Christian supernatural beings, as the only possessors of 776
personal power. But some think that power emanating from the deity is manipu-
lated by the Blessed Virgin and particular saints, and they as well as he must be
propitiated for best results. When asked why she prayed to St. Enda rather than
to other saints, an old woman said that this saint is "nearer to God" and therefore
able to capture more of his power than others. A few islanders hold that these
intermediary entities possess power not emanating from the deity, and thus may
be approached individually through prayer and sacrifice for their favor. The saints
most often appeased are St. Patrick, St. Brigid, St. Enda, and the patron saint of
the island.

The Devil is thought to command power for evil as great as or greater than
that of the Virgin Mary and the saints for good. Some believe that he controls 753
malevolent pagan beings as well as his own minions from Hell, and he both tempts 752
Christians to sin and attacks them bodily causing sickness, injury, and other mis- 796
fortunes. He is abroad at all times, although his power is amplified on such
occasions as Allhallows' Eve, and sometimes he can be seen by human eyes—as a
huge, dark, indistinct figure standing at a distance, usually after nightfall or when
it is raining heavily. One evening during a severe storm, I visited without advance
notice a man milking his cow at the back of the island, and he would not approach
me as I stood atop a fence wearing oilskin and sou'wester until I called out to
him and established the fact that I was not the "big fellow" come to do him
harm. Animals are especially sensitive to the presence of Satan, and asses which 825 •
run about braying loudly are believed to have seen him.

The folk do not admit to dissent or skepticism as regards their Catholic 771
faith, despite their anti-clerical attitudes, but skepticism can be inferred from many 775
of their utterances. Most doubt centers around the reality of the hereafter and its
nature, if it exists. Invariably when I talked of religion with them, whether singly
or in groups, my own views of the afterworld were solicited eagerly, and such 123
remarks as the following, pronounced with anxiety, were forthcoming from them:
"Is there really a life after death?", "Will we meet relatives there?", "Is it bodies or
souls that live in Heaven?", "If we all meet in Heaven, won't it be too crowded?",
"How could God be so cruel as to put people in a big fire?", and "Sure, no one has
ever returned to tell of the afterlife." The most public expression of skepticism
that my wife and I encountered was in a pub when she was requested to sing
"Galway Bay" before a crowd of boisterous men; after she sang the line, "And if

CHRISTIAN AND PAGAN REINTERPRETATIONS • 105

539 origin, and the church honors St. Martin of Tours in the liturgy of November
796 11th. O Suilleabhain suggests that the Catholic feast has been reinterpreted with
[178] a pagan festival, which had the sacrificial shedding of blood as one of its main
[182] facets. St. Martin also is associated with the grinding of corn and with miraculous
[252] powers for causing growth in plants and creating animals from inanimate matter.
In Inis Beag, the saint is regarded as a miller who was martyred in Ireland during
796 the Middle Ages by being cast under a mill wheel and ground to death. A few
796 islanders still observe the taboos of not turning wheels or spinning on the vigil
798 and feast day to honor his martyrdom. The Sunday before St. Martin's Day is
796 called "bloody Sunday," when those who can afford to do so butcher a sheep to be
796 consumed by the family on the feast day; others less fortunate kill a fowl or duck
782 during the vigil. Using the sacrificed animal's blood, the father or mother makes
[231] the sign of the cross on the forehead of each member of the family, while praying
[229] that the saint guard the safety of all in the year to follow. Some folk use the blood
[231] to bless in a like manner the fireplace, bedposts, front door, and outbuildings; all
crosses, including those on the forehead, are allowed to remain until obliterated
by natural causes.

796 Just as the girls of Inis Beag carry the Brigid's Doll and beg from door to
825 door on the feast day of the saint, the boys do the same with a wren attached to
417 a long wooden pole on the morning of St. Stephen's Day, the feast day following
53 Christmas. The "wrenboys" travel in pairs and are invited into each home, where
they are awarded coins for dancing and singing this song:

Wren, wren, the king of the birds,
St. Stephen's Day he was caught in the furze.
So little I am, my family is great.
Get up landlady and give us a break.

Up with the kettle and down with the pan,
And give us a shilling to carry the wren.
If you haven't a shilling a ha'penny will do.
If you haven't a ha'penny—God bless you.

[184] Handkerchiefs, ribbons, and a sprig of holly also are attached to the pole, and in
1959 only one pair of youths managed to "hunt the wren" successfully and thus
maintain the tradition. A home is not blessed by these visitations, as in the case
of the groups of girls on St. Brigid's Day, but the act of giving money is believed
to bring luck to the household. In some regions of the mainland, wrenboys wear
straw masks, animal skins, or horns, and carry the wren on a holly bush or decorated
wooden tray as they march in procession shouting and singing songs to the
accompaniment of homemade skin tambourines (Evans 1957:279). Little is known
of the pagan roots of the ceremony.

771 In addition to the reinterpretations associated with the holy well and with
776 Celtic festivals, there are many others of lesser significance of which only three
will be considered here: beliefs concerning ghosts, the evil eye, and the afterworld.
771 We have seen that most of the folk have had contact of some sort with the fairies;
775 they also have witnessed ghosts—called "shades"—in corporeal form in Inis Beag
or sailing the surrounding waters. These beings, who "aren't of this world," some-

775 parts fashioned by human hands. A valley in Inis Thiar is believed to have been
772 created by such a ship passing over the island, "with a great roar and blowing of
[173] wind." According to Celtic tradition, souls not only transmigrated to the Land of
[825] Youth but became reincarnated on earth or embodied in animals through metem-
psychosis. The belief in reincarnation appears not to have persisted in Inis Beag,
but seals sometimes are thought to be repositories of souls; those creatures so
possessed look and act human and attach themselves to fishermen who have aided
or harmed them, and whose *curach* they will pursue relentlessly. I was told by an
old man of a seal that he had cursed at sea for fouling his net, which later followed
in his wake for many miles glaring with rage, and finally pursued him 30 feet
onto the strand as he and his frightened mates carried the canoe hurriedly to its cot.

Religion and Personality

157 It is appropriate here to assess the basic personality structure of Inis Beag
771 islanders, since traits such as sexual puritanism, hypochondria, depression, maso-
chism, conformism, and ambivalence toward authority are linked causally with
religion in a very direct manner. Other personality characteristics, already or yet
to be considered, which are more peripheral to religion include secretiveness, envy
and jealousy, dogmatism, indolence, feelings of inferiority, and verbal skill.

157 Probably the most prominent trait of Inis Beag (and Irish) personality is
831 sexual puritanism. Its etiology is complex and much debated, but appears to
embrace most significantly historical (such as the influence of ascetic monasticism
and Jansenism), sociocultural (such as the Oedipus complex and male solidarity),
and psychological (such as masochism) variables. How long it has been a major
component of Irish national character is conjectural, for it is impossible to appraise
with accuracy Irish society, culture, and personality prior to the nineteenth century.
[174] Sexual attitudes and behavior in Celtic, medieval, and early modern times can be
surmised only from tangential and questionable sources; depending on which
sources are quoted, as good a case can be made for sexual puritanism as its
opposite before 1800.

157 The inculcation of sexual puritanism in Inis Beag must be examined in
831 three contexts: informal social controls of the curate and those imposed by the
864 islanders on themselves, the influence of visiting "missions," and enculturation in
626 the home. The first of these has been taken up at length in the last chapter. Suffice
793 it to say here, some folk (especially certain youths who consider themselves
834 "worldly") resent the intrusions of priests and neighbors into their sexual lives.
They ask what right have young, virginal, inexperienced, and sexually unknow-
ledgeable curates to give advice and pass judgments in this sphere. Equally resented
are those persons who hide themselves in the darkness or behind fences to over-
hear the conversations of passersby, which may pertain to sexual matters, and
those who maintain close scrutiny of visitors during the summer, both day and
831 night, in order to discover them in "compromising" situations. Sexual rumors run
203 rife in the island, such as those concerning the "nude" sunbathing of mainland
[609] girls (bared shoulders and lower thighs) and the "attacks" on them at night by

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

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834 bathing his chest in the mother's absence. (In this case, Oedipal and
759 sexual attitudes probably were at work in tandem.)
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158 It must be pointed out that nudity is also shunned for "health"
751 reasons, for another obtrusive Inis Beag character trait is hypochondria.
291 In some cases, however, it is hard to determine whether concern with
834 modesty or health is dominant in a particular behavioral response. Fear
753 of colds and influenza is foremost among health concerns; rheumatism
and related muscular joint ailments, migraine headaches and other psy-
chosomatic disorders, tooth decay, indigestion ("nervous stomach"),
and hypermetropia are other widespread pathologies which cause worry
among the folk—not to mention those of supernatural origin.

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827 Secrecy surrounds the acts of urination and defecation. The evac-
1863 uation of infants before siblings and strangers is discouraged, and
325 animals that discharge in the house are driven out. Chickens that ha-
562 bitually "dirty" their nests while setting are soon killed and eaten.
273 Although some women drink spirits privately, they seldom do so at
241 parties. In part this is because of the embarrassment involved in visiting
the outside toilet with men in the "street" looking on. One of the most
carefully guarded secrets of Inis Beag, unreported in the many works
describing island culture, is the use of human manure mixed with sand
as a fertilizer. We were on the island eight months before we discovered
that compost is not "street drippings" and "scraw," but decomposed
feces. With "turf" becoming more difficult to procure from the main-
237 land, some islanders have taken to importing coal and processed peat and
372 burning cattle dung. The dung is prepared for use in difficult-to-reach
plots at the back of the island when tourists are few in number; it is
burned covertly because of the overtones of sex and poverty. Another
514 custom that my wife and I learned of late in our research, due to the
283 secrecy surrounding it, concerns the thickening of wool; men are re-
462 quired to urinate in a container and tread the wool therein with their
bare feet.

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522 Other major manifestations of sexual repression in Inis Beag are
154 the lack of a "dirty joke" tradition (at least as the term is understood
by ethnologists and folklorists) and the style of dancing, which allows
little bodily contact among participants. I have heard men use various
verbal devices—innuendoes, puns, and asides—that they believed bore
123 sexual connotations; relatively speaking, they were pallid. In the song
that I composed, one line of a verse refers to an island bachelor arising
late in the day after "dreaming perhaps of a beautiful mate"; this is